

# Jeremiah - Introduction & Background

## Title

Like most OT books, the Book of Jeremiah derives its name from the work's central character. The Hebrew title of the book is *Yirmeyahu* or *Yimeyah*, which means "Yahweh establishes." Other possibilities for the meaning of this name include "Yahweh establishes," "Yahweh hurls down," "Yahweh looses," "Yahweh appoints," "Yahweh sends," "Yahweh throws," and "Yahweh founds."<sup>1</sup> The LXX entitles the book *Hermias* and the Latin Vulgate calls it *Jeremias*. The English title of the book is Jeremiah.

## Authorship

The book internally indicates that Jeremiah was the author (1:1, 11; 14:1; 18:1). The NT indicates that Jeremiah wrote the book by ascribing its various quotations to Jeremiah (Matt 2:17-18; Jer 31:15; Matt 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:4; Jer 7:11; Rom 11:27; Jer 31:33; Heb 8:8-13; Jer 31:33-34). The Old Testament also indicates that Jeremiah was the writer (Dan 9:2; Jer 25:10; 29:11). Ecclesiasticus (49:6-7), Josephus (*Antiquities*, 10.5.1), and the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 14b) also mention that Jeremiah authored the work. Geisler notes, "In the field of archeology the Lachish letters (dating from 588 BC) offer both linguistic and historical support for the authorship of Jeremiah." Moreover, the general flavor of the book seems to fit the pre-exilic time period in which Jeremiah lived.

While Jeremiah was the book's author, Baruch served as the prophet's amanuensis. In 605 BC (36:1-2), "Jeremiah dictated all his prophecies to his secretary Baruch from the beginning of his ministry until the fourth year of Jehoiakim. After this scroll was destroyed by the king, Jeremiah dictated a more complete edition to Baruch (see 36-38)<sup>4</sup> and later sections were also composed." Thus, the entire work was completed under the direction of Jeremiah. The only exception to this generalization is the book's final chapter that could not have been written by Jeremiah since 51:64 indicates that Jeremiah's own words stopped at that point. It is likely that Baruch or an anonymous editor added this final chapter involving Jehoiachin's release from prison in 561 BC. Because chapter 52 is nearly identical to 2 Kings 24-25, this material may have been excerpted from a large historical source.<sup>6</sup> Baruch's editorial influence notwithstanding,<sup>7</sup> it is unlikely that the Book of Jeremiah is the product of multiple editors. Feinberg observes, "The conclusion appears inescapable that Baruch's rewritten scroll was the basis for Jeremiah's written prophecies. The book bears marks of having been gathered together by one person at one time. For example, many of its parts are interdependent. Arguments for different, multiple editings and changes are highly subjective and inconclusive."

Based on the book's treatment of Jer 50–51, some contend that Jeremiah could not have been the book's author. They argue that Jer 50–51 depict Babylon's destruction after Jeremiah had earlier instructed prayer on Babylon's behalf, these chapters stylistically differ from the rest of the book, and Jeremiah exhibits too much knowledge about Babylon in these chapters. However, it is possible to urge submission to Babylon in order to escape her wrath while simultaneously depicting her godlessness. Also, these chapters are stylistically reminiscent of the book's other chapters. In addition, various styles for different subject matters are replete in prophetic writings. Furthermore, Jeremiah's eyewitness and prophetic status would have given him knowledge of Babylon.

Others have challenged Jeremiah's authorship on the grounds that the LXX (and subsequent English texts) is 2700 words shorter than the Masoretic Text. Also, the LXX follows a different order than the Masoretic Text. However, Jeremiah added more to the second text after Jehoiakim burned the first text (Jer 36:2,23,32). This latter text was probably taken away with the Jews into Babylonian captivity and therefore became the basis of the longer Masoretic Text. Some have speculated that a shorter text could have been later produced by Jeremiah while in Egypt or by Baruch following Jeremiah's death. This shorter text may have become the basis for the LXX.

As far as Jeremiah's biography is concerned, he was the son of Hilkiah the priest (1:1). Some believe that Hilkiah was the same man who discovered the neglected Law hidden in the temple during the days of Josiah (2 Kings 22:3-14). While this view is merely conjecture, it is clear that Jeremiah descended from a priestly line. In this respect, Jeremiah was similar to both Ezekiel (Ezek 1:3) and Zechariah (Zech 1:1; Neh 12:1,4,16). However, the book provides no evidence that Jeremiah himself actually became a priest. Rather, Jeremiah's role was to work from the outside by exposing Israel's corrupt religious and political system.

Jeremiah was from the city of Anathoth (1:1). This small village was located in the hill country of Benjamin (1:1; Joshua 21:15-19) and two to three miles northeast of Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, this city's name comes from Antah. The Ugaritic texts identify this individual as Baal's consort. Jeremiah experienced some of his ministry under divinely imposed limitations such as not being allowed to marry, procreate, or publicly mourn (16:1-5). He is often called the "weeping prophet" on account of the repeated rejections he suffered at the hands of the rebellious inhabitants of Judah. He obviously was a man of means since he was able to buy property (32:1-44; 37:12) as well as own a scribe or secretary named Baruch. According to tradition, Jeremiah experienced a martyr's death in Egypt. Tertullian and Jerome both indicate that the inhabitants of Tahphanes stoned Jeremiah to death.<sup>12</sup>

## **Scope**

The book's opening verses define the book's scope as lasting from the thirteenth year of Judah's last good king Josiah (1:2; 25:3) in 627 BC until the exile (1:3) that took place in 586 BC. Because chapters 40–44 transpired after Jerusalem fell, the book's scope can be expanded further until 582–580 BC. The events of the book's final chapter transpired in 561 B.C. but are not counted as part of the scope of Jeremiah's ministry since they were written by another author (51:64) decades later. Jeremiah likely began his ministry in his late teens (Jer 1:6-7) making 643 B.C. under the reign of Manasseh the probable date of his birth.<sup>16</sup> Some place the inauguration of his ministry as occurring later due to his omission of Josiah's reforms. However, it is unlikely that Jeremiah would have mentioned these events since his book focused upon covenant disobedience. Thus, Jeremiah's ministry spanned close to 47 years and covered the last five kings of Judah (Josiah from 640 to 609 BC, Jehoahaz or Shallum in 609 BC, Jehoiakim or Eliakim from 609 to 598 BC, Jehoiachin or Jeconiah or Coniah from 598 to 597 BC, and Zedekiah or Mattaniah from 597 to 586 BC) as well as the governorship of Gedaliah (586 BC). Jeremiah's pre-exilic prophetic contemporaries included Huldah, Zephaniah (635–625 BC), and Habakkuk (609–605 BC). Ezekiel (592–570 BC) and Daniel (605–536 BC) were among his exilic prophetic contemporaries.

### **Date**

While the book began to be compiled by Baruch in 605 BC (36:1-2), its final form obviously occurred after the book's recorded events in 582–580 BC. Furthermore, the book's final form could not have been achieved earlier than 561 BC since the last chapter records Jehoiachin's release from prison at that time. Some have suggested a date as late as 520 BC for the attainment of the book's final form.

### **Recipients**

The book's events began to be recorded in 605 BC. Individual events recorded in the book were written to warn Judah of her covenant rebellion so as to deter her from falling. However, the exiles were the book's ultimate audience (2:2; 3:17; 7:2; 18:11). While generally addressed to Judah, the book also specifically addresses kings (13:18; 21:3, 11; 22:1-2, 11, 18, 24), priests (20:1-3), prophets (23:9; 28:15), and nations (1:5; 27:2-4; 46-51).

### **Historical Background**

Internally, the book begins with the reign of Josiah who was the last of Judah's good kings. However, his reforms (2 Kings 22:3–23:25) led to only an outer conformity to the Law rather than an internal righteousness. Child sacrifice introduced by the earlier reigns of Ahab and Manasseh proved too strong for Josiah's reforms to permanently root out. Judah's continued rebellion was evidenced in her embracement of the worship of the Queen of Heaven (7:18; 44:19).

Internationally, Assyrian power began to wane with the death of Ashurbanipal in 626 BC. The Neo Babylonian empire rose to prominence when Nabopolassar defeated the Assyrian army in 626 BC. The Neo Babylonian empire then began its expansionistic policies in 616 BC. Assyrian power was further eroded when the Babylonians destroyed the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh in 612 BC. The Babylonians again defeated the Assyrian army at Haran in 609 BC.

Jehoahaz followed Josiah to Judah's throne when Pharaoh Neco at Megiddo killed Josiah in 609 BC. However, Neco quickly deposed Jehoahaz and replaced him with Jehoiakim who was another of Josiah's sons. In 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon defeated Egypt at Carchemish leading Jehoiakim to switch his allegiance away from Egypt and instead to become a vassal of Babylon. In that same year, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to claim the throne following Nabopolassar's death. Nebuchadnezzar's first deportation also took place in that same year when Daniel and some princes were taken to Babylon (Dan 1:1-6).

When Babylon was defeated in 601 BC, Jehoiakim again switched his allegiance from Babylon back to Egypt (2 Kings 24:1). However, Jehoiakim died before Nebuchadnezzar could return to exact revenge thereby causing Jehoiachin to ascend to the throne.

Jehoiachin surrendered to Babylon in 597 BC. This event led to the second deportation that included Ezekiel. It also involved Nebuchadnezzar placing Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah on the throne after deposing Jehoiachin. During Zedekiah's idolatrous reign, he rebelled against Babylon and sought refuge with Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt (2 Kgs 24:20–25:1). Thus, Nebuchadnezzar launched his final siege against Jerusalem beginning in 588 BC leading to Jerusalem's final fall in 586 BC.

After Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as a puppet governor, he urged the remaining Jews in the land to serve the king of Babylon. However, this policy led to Gedaliah's assassination at the hands of Ishmael of Ammon. In order to protect themselves from Nebuchadnezzar's wrath, the Jewish remnant fled to Egypt. Jeremiah was forced to go along with them. There, Jeremiah spent his remaining years ministering among the Jews in Egypt.

Thus, Jeremiah's ministry can be summarized as follows. "From 627 to 605 BC he prophesied while Judah was threatened by Assyria and Egypt. From 605 to 586 BC he proclaimed God's judgment while Judah was threatened and besieged by Babylon. From 586 to 580 BC he ministered in Jerusalem and Egypt after Judah's downfall."

### **Message**

As the exiles of Judah read of Jeremiah's prophecies of uprooting, tearing down, destroying, and overthrowing (1:10a) they will understand that covenant rebellion has caused their downfall and 70-year captivity. An explanation for their captivity will also give them an incentive to submit to their captivity rather than trying to resist it. Similarly, as the

exiles read Jeremiah's prophecies of building up and planting (1:10b), they will learn of God's purpose to restore them. Knowledge of God's restoration agenda for them will give them hope as they endure the 70-year captivity.

### **Purposes**

Jeremiah had at least two purposes in mind when he authored his book. First, he wanted to preserve Judah from complete annihilation by mandating that she submit to her captivity. Thus, Jeremiah's message was different than the prophet Isaiah who promised deliverance in the midst of the Day of the Lord. Second, Jeremiah wanted to give the exiles hope in the midst of their captivity by explaining God's restoration purposes for them.

### **Structure**

The author develops his message through the following seven-fold structure: the calling narrative (1), prophecies of judgment against Judah (2–25), the nation's reaction to Jeremiah's prophecies of judgment (26–29), the Book of Consolation featuring God's restoration agenda for Judah and Israel (30–33), a description of Judah's present calamity involving the fall of Jerusalem (34–45), oracles of judgment against the nation (46–51), and a historical appendix demonstrating how Jeremiah's prophecies were ultimately fulfilled (52). According to this structure, the fall of Jerusalem is described two times (39; 52). The first 38 chapters describe events before the fall of Jerusalem while chapters (40–51) describe events after Jerusalem's fall. Because the book does not follow a chronological framework, the following charts explain which chapters occur at what times.

<b>King</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Chapters</b>
Josiah	627–609 B.C.	1-20
Josiah's death began evil reigns of his sons		
Jehoiakim (Eliakim)	609	26
	605	35:11
	605	25
	605	36
	605	45
	605	46-49
Rebellion of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin (Jeconiah or Coniah) introduced the deportation to Babylon in 597 B.C.		
Zedekiah (Mattaniah)	597	24
	597	27
	594	28
	594	29
	594	50-51
Nebuchadnezzar launches siege against Jerusalem on 1/10/588 B.C. (39:1; 52:4)		
	Undated	30
	Undated	31
	588	21-23
	588	32-33
	587	37
	587	34
	587	38
	586	39; 52
Final destruction of Jerusalem		

8/10/586 B.C. (52:12)		
Gedaliah	586	40-44

King	Dates	Chapters
Josiah	640–609 B.C.	1-6
Jehoahaz (Shallum)	609	22:10-12
Jehoiakim (Eliakim)	609–6598	7-20
		25-26
		35-36
		45-46:12
		47-49
Jehoiachin (Jeconiah or Coniah)	598–597	22-23
Zedekiah (Mattaniah)	597–586	21
		24
		27-34
		37-39
Gedaliah	586	40-44

### Theological Themes

Numerous theological themes recur throughout the Book of Jeremiah. First, the book stresses inward renewal through the New Covenant rather than mere external conformity to the Law as the basis for pleasing God. Second, the book emphasizes that the Gentiles are accountable to God and part of His redemptive program (46–51; Gen 12:3). Third, the book emphasizes the reality of Israel's covenant judgment. Fourth, the book stresses Israel's covenant restoration is as certain as the fixed order of the physical world.

### Unique Characteristics

The Book of Jeremiah boasts several outstanding characteristics. First, Jeremiah is the most autobiographical of the prophets. He constantly reveals his emotion, passion, and personality (10:23-25; 11:18–12:6; 14:17-18; 15:10-23; 17:9-11,14-18; 18:20; 20:7-18; 32:1-44; 38:1-13). Thus, he has been appropriately named the weeping prophet (9:1; 13:17; 14:17). Such personal pain may relate to *Yahweh* who with personal pain brings judgment upon Judah. Second, the book's identification and exposition of the New Covenant is unique.

Third, the book places an inordinate emphasis upon the word of the lord (1:9; 20:9; 23:29). Recurring phrases include "the word of the Lord came to me saying," "*Yahweh* said to me," and "thus says *Yahweh*." Fourth, like Ezekiel, Jeremiah acted out many of his prophecies (7:29–8:3; 13:1-14; 16:1-9; 18:1-10; 19:1-12; 27; 32:6-15; 43:8-13). Fifth, Jeremiah was routinely rejected by those that he ministered to. The phrase "the people did not listen" occurs over 36 times throughout the book.

Sixth, the book follows more of a topical rather than a chronological arrangement (36:2). Seventh, the book mentions the multiple documents that were used to put it into its final

form (25:13; 30:2; 36:2; 36:28,32; 51:64). Eighth, the book refers to Babylon 164 times, which is more references than are found in all the rest of Scripture. Ninth, the book provides more information about the historical setting of its oracles as well as its process of composition than all of the other Old Testament books.

### **Genre**

The Book is comprised of many genres. They include poetic discourse, prose discourse, and prose narrative. Other genres include history, poetry, biography, and symbolism (7:29—8:3; 13:1-14; 16:1-9; 18:1-10; 19:1-12; 27; 32:6-15; 43:8-13).

### **Christ in Jeremiah**

The Book of Jeremiah is rich with Christological themes. For example, the judgment upon Jeconiah necessitates Christ's virgin birth. While the curse against Jeconiah prevents any of his descendants from sitting on David's throne (22:30), the NT includes Jeconiah in Christ's genealogy (Matt 1:12). However, Joseph was only Christ's legal but not his physical father because of his virgin birth. However, Christ's physical lineage through Mary is traced back to David's other son Nathan (Luke 3:31). Thus, Christ's virgin birth bypasses the curse of Jeconiah.

In addition, Christ seems to be present in the references to a righteous branch who would judge wisely in the place of Judah's failed kings (23:1-8; 33:15-17). Also, the book's mention of the New Covenant is Christological since Christ will inaugurate (Matt 26:26-29) and mediate this covenant. Furthermore, the description of Jeremiah as the rejected and weeping prophet (Jer 9:1; 11:19) typifies Christ who would also be a man of sorrows (Is 53:3; Luke 19:41).

Moreover, Jer 30:9 reveals a future ministry for David. According to verse 9, the nation would no longer serve foreign oppressors but rather would be devoted solely to the service of the Lord and David, who the Lord would enthrone. On the other hand, this verse may not be as Christological as many assume. It is common for interpreters to understand the reference to the resurrected millennial David (Hosea 3:5; Ezek 34:23; 37:24) as referring to David's greater son Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32,69; Acts 2:29-30; 13:22-23,34). However, such an interpretation cannot be supported from Jeremiah 30:9 and constitutes an impermissible reading of the NT back into the Old. If Jeremiah wanted David to be taken in a symbolic sense, he would have said so. Fruchtenbaum explains:

...nothing in the text indicates that *David* is to be taken symbolically. If the prophets wanted to refer to the messiah in connection with David, they used terms such as "Root of Jesse," "Branch of David," "Son of David," or "Seed of David." None of these expressions are used here. The text simply states, *David*. In keeping with literal interpretation, it is best to take the text as it reads, meaning the literal David, who, in his resurrected form, will function as the king over Israel and as a prince in subjection to the King of the world.



Thus, David will be resurrected at the same time as all of the other OT saints (Dan 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15; Rev 20:4) and rule in submission to Christ during the millennium in a co-regency form of government. This co-regency explains why the resurrected David is often referred to as merely a "prince" rather than a king. "While Jesus, the Messiah, will reign over the entire earth, David will be resurrected to reign with Christ as vice regent over the nation of Israel." Regarding the predictions of the millennial David, Walvoord similarly observes, "Though some have attempted to take this prophecy in less than its literal meaning, the clear statement is that David, who is now dead and whose body is in his tomb in Jerusalem (Acts 2:29), will be resurrected."

## **Outline**

### **I. Jeremiah's call (Jer 1:1-19)**

- (1) Jeremiah's background (1:1-3)
  - (A) Son of Hilkiah (1:1)
  - (B) Scope of ministry (1:2-3)
- (2) Jeremiah's call (1:4-10)
  - (A) Election (1:4-5)
  - (B) Jeremiah's objection (1:6)
  - (C) Divine affirmation (1:7-9)
    - (a) He will be sent by God (1:7)
    - (b) Deliverance (1:8)
    - (c) He will speak God's Word (1:9)
  - (D) Mission (1:10)
- (3) Signs depicting Jeremiah's Ministry (1:11-16)
  - (A) Almond tree (1:11-12)
    - (a) Vision (1:11)
    - (b) Explanation (1:12)
  - (B) Boiling pot (1:13-16)
    - (a) Vision (1:13)
    - (b) Explanation (1:14-16)
      - (i) North as the source of judgment (1:14)
      - (ii) Jerusalem as the object of judgment (1:15)
      - (iii) Idolatry as the reason for judgment (1:16)
- (4) Jeremiah's function (1:17-19)
  - (A) Jeremiah's mission (1:17)
  - (B) Jeremiah's protection (1:18-19)

### **II. Thirteen prophecies of judgment upon Judah (Jer 2:1—25:38)**

- (1) Nine general prophecies of judgment that include offers of repentance (Jer 2:1—19:15)

- (A) First message: Judah's unfaithfulness (Jer 2:1—3:5)
  - (a) Previous covenant fidelity (2:1-3)
  - (b) Present covenant infidelity (Jer 2:4—3:5)
    - (i) Apostasy (2:4-19)
    - (ii) Baal worship (2:20-28)
    - (iii) Guilt and judgment (2:29-37)
    - (iv) Harlotry (3:1-5)
- (B) Second message: coming judgment and the necessity for repentance (Jer 3:6—6:30)
  - (a) Judah's failure to learn from Israel's example (3:6-11)
  - (b) Israel's call to repent (Jer 3:12—4:2)
    - (i) Eschatological blessings associated with repentance (3:12-22a)
    - (ii) Definition of repentance (3:22b—4:2)
  - (c) Judah's call to repent (4:3-4)
  - (d) Coming judgment (Jer 4:5—6:30)
    - (i) Invasion described (4:5-22)
    - (ii) Destruction described (4:23-31)
    - (iii) Sins leading to the judgment (5:1-31)
      - (a) Unwillingness to repent (5:1-3)
      - (b) Apostasy (5:4-6)
      - (c) Harlotry (5:7-9)
      - (d) False sense of security (5:10-19)
      - (e) Stubbornness and rebellion (5:20-31)
    - (iv) Severity of coming judgment (6:1-30)
      - (a) Destruction of Jerusalem (6:1-8)
      - (b) Sins causing severity of the judgment (6:9-21)
        - (1) Total corruption (6:9-15)
        - (2) Stubbornness (6:16-21)
      - (c) Babylon's cruelty (6:22-26)
      - (d) The Lord's rejection of His people (6:27-30)
- (C) Third message: Temple's sermon (Jer 7:1—10:25)
  - (a) The inevitability of coming judgment (Jer 7:1—8:3)
    - (i) The mere existence of the Temple cannot stop judgment (7:1-15)
    - (ii) Judah's sins making judgment unavoidable (7:16—8:3)
      - (a) Idolatry (7:16-20)
      - (b) Superficial worship (7:21-28)
      - (c) Child sacrifice and astral worship (7:29—8:3)
  - (b) Reality and causes of coming judgment (Jer 8:4—10:25)

- (i) Willful ignorance (8:4-17)
  - (ii) First funeral dirge over Jerusalem (8:18—9:1)
  - (iii) Universal corruption (9:2-9)
  - (iv) National rebellion (9:10-16)
  - (v) Second funeral dirge over Jerusalem (9:17-22)
  - (vi) God as the only basis for boasting (9:23-26)
  - (vii) Idolatry (10:1-16)
  - (viii) Coming exile (10:17-22)
  - (ix) Invitation for wisdom (10:23-25)
- (D) Fourth message: broken covenant (Jer 11:1—12:17)
  - (a) Covenant restated (11:1-5)
  - (b) Covenant violated (11:6-10)
  - (c) Consequences of covenant violation (11:11—12:17)
    - (i) Coming destruction (11:11-17)
    - (ii) Plot against Jeremiah (11:18—12:6)
    - (iii) God forsakes Judah (12:7-13)
    - (iv) Judah to be restored and her enemies vindicated (12:14-17)
- (E) Fifth message: linen waist cloth and wine jugs (13:1-27)
  - (a) Waist cloth (13:1-11)
    - (i) Action (13:1-7)
    - (ii) Meaning (13:8-11)
  - (b) Wine jugs (13:12-14)
    - (i) Parable (13:12)
    - (ii) Meaning (13:13-14)
  - (c) Message (13:15-27)
    - (i) Warning against pride (13:15-17)
    - (ii) Prediction of the king and queen's captivity (13:18-19)
    - (iii) Sin and punishment (13:20-27)
- (F) Sixth message: drought and prayer (14:1-22)
  - (a) Drought described (14:1-6)
  - (b) Consequences of the drought (14:7-22)
    - (i) Judah's plea (14:7-9)
    - (ii) God's non-responsiveness to the plea (14:10-16)
    - (iii) Jeremiah's dirge (14:17-18)
    - (iv) Judah's plea (14:19-22)
- (G) Seventh message: Jeremiah's complaint (15:1-21)
  - (a) Judah's coming judgment (15:1-9)
  - (b) Jeremiah's self-pity (15:10-21)

- (i) Jeremiah articulates his self-pity (15:10)
  - (ii) God promises to restore Jeremiah (15:11-14)
  - (iii) Jeremiah doubts God (15:15-18)
  - (iv) God promises to restore Jeremiah (15:19-21)
- (H) Eighth message: God imposes restrictions on Jeremiah concerning marriage, mourning, and merriness (Jer 16:1—17:27)
  - (a) Restrictions (16:1-9)
    - (i) Marriage (16:1-4)
    - (ii) Mourning (16:5-7)
    - (iii) Merriness (16:8-9)
  - (b) Sins leading to judgment (Jer 16:10—17:27)
    - (i) Idolatry (16:10-13)
    - (ii) Restoration (16:14-21)
    - (iii) Entrenched sin (17:1-4)
    - (iv) God uses Psalm 1 to contrast the fate of the wicked and righteous (17:5-8)
    - (v) Wicked hearts (17:9-11)
    - (vi) Jeremiah's imprecation (17:12-18)
    - (vii) Sabbath violation (17:19-27)
- (I) Ninth message: potter's wheel and broken jar (Jer 18:1—19:15)
  - (a) Potter's Wheel (18:1-23)
    - (i) The potter's power over the clay (18:1-4)
    - (ii) God's power over the nations with the hope that they will repent (18:5-12)
    - (iii) Judah's covenant rebellion naturally leads to covenant curses (18:13-17)
    - (iv) Jeremiah 's imprecation against those plotting to take his life (18:18-23)
  - (b) Potter's jar (19:1-15)
    - (i) Place of the message: Valley of Hinnom (19:1-2)
    - (ii) Content of the message: Judah's hardness (19:3-9)
    - (iii) Illustration of the message: Jeremiah breaks the potter's jar (19:10-13)
    - (iv) Repetition of the message at the Temple (19:14-15)
- (2) Pashur abuses Jeremiah (20:1-18)
  - (A) Pashur's abuse (20:1-2)
  - (B) Jeremiah's prophecy to Pashur (20:3-6)
  - (C) Jeremiah's complaint to God (20:7-18)

- (a) Jeremiah says that God has made him an object of derision (20:7-8)
  - (b) Jeremiah's compulsion to preach (20:9)
  - (c) Jeremiah's awareness of plots against him (20:10)
  - (d) Jeremiah's trust in God (20:11-13)
  - (e) Jeremiah regrets his birth (20:14-18)
- (3) Four specific prophecies of judgment that omit offers of repentance (Jer 21:1—25:38)
- (A) Tenth Message: rebuke of the Kings (21:1—23:8)
    - (a) Zedekiah (21:1—22:9)
      - (i) Zedekiah seeks Jeremiah's counsel (21:1-2)
      - (ii) Jeremiah's answer to various groups (21:3—22:9)
        - (a) Zedekiah (21:3-7)
        - (b) People (21:8-10)
        - (c) King's household (21:11-14)
        - (d) Zedekiah and people (22:1-9)
    - (b) Shallum (Jehoahaz) (22:10-12)
    - (c) Jehoiakim (22:13-19)
      - (i) Splendor (22:13-14)
      - (ii) Covenant rebellion (22:15-17)
      - (iii) Death (22:18-19)
    - (d) Jehoiachin (Coniah or Jeconiah) (22:20-30)
      - (i) Catastrophe (22:20-23)
      - (ii) Captivity (22:24-27)
      - (iii) Curse (22:28-30)
    - (e) Righteous branch (23:1-8)
      - (i) Evil kings to be judged (23:1-2)
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    - (a) Corrupt character (23:9-15)
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    - (a) By people and officials (26:16)
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    - (D) People exiled (52:15-16)
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## Introduction

Jeremiah: longest book in the Bible; probably the most misunderstood and therefore the least read. Many scholars consider Jeremiah the most spiritual person in the OT.

Jeremiah = "the Lord hurls" (often used for "exalts," "lifts up," "holds high"); Ex 15:1.

Jeremiah: one of the most revered prophets; his book is one of the most autobiographical in the Bible; hence, we know a great deal about this man. He is a model for us to follow in the sense that he is deeply spiritual and uncompromising—with himself and his nation Israel (more specifically, the tribe of Judah).

### **Historical Overview**

Time frame: civil war divided Israel into two houses—Israel to the north and Judah to the south. The subsequent kings, particularly in the north, went from bad to worse. The Northern Kingdom, denotatively called Israel, fell into ruin, idolatry, and finally the Assyrians took them captive. Judah to the South survived longer, and Judah will be our focus in this book. (The author might mistakenly use the name Israel, but should be mindful of the fact that he is speaking of the House of Judah, the Southern Kingdom—the Southern half of the kingdom—recognizing that the Northern half has already fallen slave to the Assyrians.)

Ultimately, the Babylonians accomplish two things: they conquer the Assyrians; Nebuchadnezzar is used by God to take Judah captive. Jeremiah is in the strange position of admonishing his country to surrender and to yield to the Gentile ruler since, Jeremiah says, this is the instrument of God for the judgment of the nation. He was treated as a treasonous person. It is during Jeremiah's time that Judah falls and the Babylonian captivity begins—one of the most important portions of OT history, with lots of relevance historically as well as prophetically. It becomes a very crucial period of time, as it is the time of Daniel and Ezekiel and many prophets. It is a period of some power changes that have profound implications on our understanding of the Bible in general (also a period of time that will lend itself to some incredible discoveries relative to our day and Israel today). The chronology of this day is very well documented, which will turn out to be very meaningful for the Believer, as dates will become very significant (May 1948 and June 1967).

Read 2 Chr 34-35 and 2 Kings 22-24 for historical background. Also suggested: read a book that has nothing to do with Jeremiah, and yet may have everything to do with God's purpose of this study: *The Light and the Glory* by Peter Marshall and David Manual.

### **Arrangement of the Book**

We know more about Jeremiah than any other OT prophet. We know him as the "Weeping Prophet" (and indeed, if the reader touches his work, there is very deep feeling). It is also regarded by many scholars as the most difficult book in the OT for a number of reasons, not the least of which is the arrangement of the chapters.

The chapters are more topically arranged than chronologically: Jer 46-51 occur before the fall of Jerusalem (which is mentioned in Jer 39); Jer 37-44 seem to be consecutive; Jer 50-51 have special problems (which will be dealt with) and there is a very special problem in Jer 52. There are some scholastic arrangement problems, however the answer is simple:

to take it chapter by chapter and don't struggle with the arrangement, but struggle with what he is saying!

There is a lot of historical background needed, which is well documented in the Scripture and through all sorts of archaeological discoveries. It is pretty well understood what happened in that period. When the reader understands the flow of the kings and the powers, the book of Jeremiah will have more significance.

In the Hebrew canon the OT is divided into three groups: The Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Prophets were divided into the "Former Prophets" (Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings) and the "Latter Prophets" (Major and Minor Prophets except Lamentations and Daniel), but at the head of the scroll of the Latter Prophets was Jeremiah (re: Matt 27:9).

### **Style**

Jeremiah's style is quite opposite to that of Isaiah, whose style was elegant and lofty—a fabulous writer, but with a very high style. In contrast, Jeremiah is very direct, very simple, but as a result, very vivid, incisive and clear. He uses a lot of poetry, and is very lyrical, but still direct. Heavy use of nature, he is a man of the earth. He is called the "Weeping Prophet" as he is tender, sympathetic and will almost continually express a deep anguish of soul. This is not casual stuff; it is in the very fiber of his being and will come through even in the translations.

They came from an apostate background. The previous kings were idolatrous and there was a reform. One of the things that happens during the reform: in one of the storeroom chambers, tucked away and lost, was the discovery of the Law (which the author believes is the book of Deuteronomy). That discovery has had a big impact. The book of Jeremiah has 66 passages from Deuteronomy, and also references to Job and Psalms (in effect), and lots of indebtedness, in the minds of some scholars, to Hosea. The book of Jeremiah is quoted over fifty times in the New Testament, and over half of those references are in the book of Revelation. He is regarded by some scholars as one of the greatest spiritual giants of all time.

### **Prophetic Background**

From 800 to 650 BC there was a galaxy of prophets in Israel. Zephaniah, Obadiah, and a woman by the name of Huldah, the prophetess; each were contemporaries of Jeremiah in Judah. Huldah shows up in 2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chr 34:22; she's a very well known prophetess in Jerusalem. Jeremiah was from Anathoth and, in the early stages, not in the limelight. During the captivity there were also three prophets: Ezekiel, Daniel and Jeremiah. Daniel was deported as a teenager, Ezekiel in the second siege, and then, of course, Jeremiah. There are apparently about 18 points of contact between Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Nahum and Habakkuk were contemporaries, approximately, of this time.

### **The Time Period**

Jeremiah's ministry extends a period of time that spans five kings. Three of them are very important; the other two reign only three months (they are important, but they don't do much damage in three months).

## **Josiah**

The first king is Josiah, he reigned from about 639 to 609 BC (He was a good guy.) Prior to him was Hezekiah, then Manasseh, who is reputed, by tradition, to have sawn Isaiah in half. When Josiah became king, his reign was positive. After he had reigned about 10 years, Jeremiah is called; he was about 20 at the time.

## **Idolatry Introduced**

<u>Time BC</u>	<u>Reign</u>	<u>Events</u>
639-609	Josiah	
629		Fall of Jerusalem
612		Fall of Ninevah
609		Death of Josiah at Megiddo
609	Jehoahaz (3 month reign)	
609-597	Jehoiakim	
605		Battle of Carchemish
		Fall of Assyrians
		1st Siege of Jerusalem (Daniel
exiled)		
597		2nd Siege of Jerusalem (Ezekiel
exiled)		
597	Jehoiachin (Coniah, Jeconiah) 3 month reign	
597-586 Z	Zedekiah	
588-586		Final (or 3rd) Siege of Jerusalem
586		Assassination of Gadaliah

## **Babylonian Rulers**

625-605	Naboplassar	Conquered Assyria
	Father of Nebuchadnezzar	
605-562	Nebuchadnezzar	

Josiah took the throne when he was 8 years old, and he reigned for 30 years. Important: up until Josiah's reign, Assyria had been so strong that they had taken the Northern Kingdom captive. The previous kings introduced increasing amounts of Assyrian elements in their worship, namely idolatry. Josiah takes charge as king, and God calls him to undertake reforms. God is also raising the strength of the Babylonians, to the south, who are putting pressure on Assyria, giving Judah more freedom from Assyria. With problems between Assyria and Babylon, there is more opportunity for Judah to get rid of some of these

Assyrian practices. It's about 6 years into Josiah's reign that he seeks the Lord (according to 2 Chr 34:3), and his reforms begin about 4 years later (2 Chr 24:36). It also happens that the book of the Law was discovered in the Temple a few years later (in 2 Kings 22:3-8 and 2 Chr 34:8-15). The reforms are detailed in 2 Kings 22-23.

### **Jeremiah is Called**

It is under this background (past idolatry into reforms) that Jeremiah is emerging as a prophet. The reforms did not stick. We have evidence of that by Jeremiah's ceaseless condemnation of Judah's sin. As we go through the book of Jeremiah, he is not going to let go of the fact that Judah is sinning and that God is going to use Babylon. He also admonishes them to stay out of this world's politics, but they keep dabbling. God uses their enemies to bring about His judgment.

Jeremiah was called in about 629 BC. Approximately 17 years later Nineveh falls. In the Southern Kingdom Josiah was doing some reforms, but the Northern Kingdom had fallen to the Assyrians. They're starting to face pressure from this rising power.

Prior to Jeremiah, Assyria, the dominant power, had taken over the Northern Kingdom.

There were, really, three major powers at this time: Assyria, Babylon and Egypt. They were fighting each other, allying with each other, etc. Assyria is now starting to face this growing power as Babylon is gradually getting stronger.

### **Josiah Dies**

In 609 BC Pharaoh Necho joins Assyria as an ally. Josiah starts to interfere with this and Pharaoh Necho warns him to stay out (but Josiah doesn't listen). There is a battle at Megiddo where Josiah is killed. This is a major tragedy for Judah. Babylon is starting to get stronger than Egypt, which will prove very critical under Nabopolassar of Chaldea.

Nabopolassar took charge in a shift of Babylonian kings (about 625 BC). He gets strong enough to destroy Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians (612 BC). It is his son, Nebuchadnezzar the second, that defeats Pharaoh Necho in the famous battle of Carchemish near the Euphrates River in 605 BC (Jer 46, 2 Chr 35). The important part of this battle is that now Babylon rules the world.

Nineveh falls in 612 BC during Josiah's reign. Josiah dies at Megiddo in 609 BC and Jehoahaz is on the throne for three months. Jehoiakim follows and, in turn, Jehoiachin.

### **Jehoahaz**

Josiah was a popular king, and with his death the people were distraught. They take matters into their own hands. They set Jehoahaz on the throne. He is the son of Josiah, but not the oldest son. He only reigns 3 months, which is why not much is found of him in the Scriptures. He tends to have an anti-Egypt, pro-Babylonian policy, but Pharaoh Necho in Egypt doesn't like that policy. Pharaoh Necho does four things: he deposes Jehoahaz (2 Kings 23:31-33); takes him to Egypt; exacts tribute from Judah; sets the oldest son of Josiah (who happens to be Jehoahaz's half brother) on the throne (2 Kings 23:34,36). His



name was Eliakim, but Pharaoh Necho changed his name to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:30-35; 2 Chr 36:1-4).

### **Jehoiakim**

Jehoiakim is very important. He reigns 11 years. It is his reign that gives Jeremiah his greatest trial and opposition. He and Jeremiah are at opposite ends on every subject (religion, politics, etc). Jeremiah is calling out for reforms and Jehoiakim ignores him. Jeremiah tries to point out that God is raising Babylon to judge Judah; Jehoiakim wants to resist Babylon and play intrigues with Egypt. Jehoiakim is the worst, most ungodly of all Judah's kings. He is a bloodthirsty tyrant. He is the enemy of the truth. He is uncaring, relative to the worship of the God of Israel. He extracted exorbitant taxes and forced labor without pay.

In Jehoiakim's 11-year reign he sponsors idolatry, and widespread injustice (Jer 22:13-19; 2 Kings 23:37). He's the inveterate foe of God and His Word (26:20-23; 36:20-26), and his revolt (598-597 BC) is unsuccessful (2 Kings 24:1-5). This leads to the first siege of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah during this time is persecuted, plotted against, maligned and finally imprisoned. King Jehoiakim destroys his written prophecies. They are later replaced, which may account for some of the reasons that it is not chronological (Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch, replace the prophecies). During all this trouble, Jeremiah does not swerve from a commitment to the Lord. He has an unpopular theme, is a deep feeling patriot, yet he has to watch his nation sin, refuse to repent, and fall under God's judgment, not heeding his continual and impassioned admonitions.

### **The Sieges of Jerusalem**

Jehoiakim reigns from 609-597 BC. When the battle of Carchemish takes place and Nebuchadnezzar succeeds in defeating Pharaoh Necho (the Egyptian ally of the Assyrians at that time), he laid siege to Jerusalem. At that siege certain nobles are exiled, including Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar puts a man in office by the name of Jehoiachin. He is so evil that Jeremiah puts a blood curse on him. God puts a blood curse on the royal line!! (This will be covered further, later in the study.)

Jehoiachin intrigues and tries to adopt a pro-Egypt policy against the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar takes a dim view of that which leads to the second siege of Jerusalem, where Ezekiel is exiled. Incidentally, Jehoiachin is replaced with Zedekiah and he reigns for 17 or 18 years. Zedekiah also does some poor politics and intrigues with Nebuchadnezzar's enemies. Nebuchadnezzar has had enough and starts the third siege of Jerusalem.. That is when he levels the city, takes the people captive, destroys the Temple, and appoints a governor: Gedaliah.

### **Nebuchadnezzar**

Jeremiah's call is about 629 BC. It's four years after Jeremiah starts in service as a prophet. There is a man named Nabopolassar who is emerging as a major figure in

Chaldea, the Southern province of Babylon. He ruled Babylon by 625 BC and destroyed Ninevah in 612 BC. He emerges to power and reigns until the battle of Carchemish, the fall of the Assyrian empire. He then dies and his son, Nebuchadnezzar (technically Nebuchadnezzar the Second, or more properly, Nebuchadnezzar - mistranslated for years), carries it through until about 562 BC Babylon rules the world.

### **Servitude of the Nation**

A major change in the power structure happened in 605 BC with the battle of Carchemish (46:2). Then Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and made Jehoiakim a vassal king. The nobles were then exiled (2 Kings 24:1), including Daniel (Dan 1:1). This date, the first siege of Nebuchadnezzar (where Jehoiakim was losing), is the first siege of the three, which starts a period of time called "The Servitude of the Nation" (25:11). It was prophesied to last 70 years and it did to the very day! (...more on this later...) The second and third siege happen where Nebuchadnezzar levels the city. The period of time from the first siege to the third is about 19 years.

### **Desolations of Jerusalem**

There is also a prophecy that is known as the "Desolations of Jerusalem," which is also prophesied to be 70 years. Most scholars get these two mixed up. In my opinion, the Servitude of the Nations starts at the first siege of Jerusalem. The Servitude of the Nation and the Desolations of Jerusalem are not coterminous. Many scholars presume they are, but if you look carefully they are not since Jerusalem continues to exist for those 19 years as a vassal city.

In the third siege of Nebuchadnezzar, Jerusalem is destroyed. That starts the period of time known as the Desolations of Jerusalem, which, like the Servitude of the Nation, is also predicted to be 70 years. Later on when the Jews are released from Babylon, they can go home, but they don't have the authority to rebuild the city. The rebuilding of the city, not the Temple, is one of the main trigger points in the prophecy of Daniel (which occurs later under Nehemiah).

There is a prophecy that will be explored, which mentions 2,484 years, 2 months and 3 days. There is a prophetic outlying of reason to understanding Jeremiah. There is also a personal reason for understanding Jeremiah, to understand his walk, his energy and how he withstood his circumstances. There is a national reason which will be touched upon, also.

### **Jehoiachin**

Jehoiakim dies violently in Jerusalem after his 11-year rule, just as Jeremiah predicted (Jer 22:18-19). Chronicles records Jehoiakim's deportation to Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar (2 Chr 36:6-1; Dan 1:1). Jehoiachin, his son, replaces him. He only reigns 3 months. He also appears in Jeremiah as "Jeconiah" (2 Kings 24:8) or "Coniah" (Jer 22:24,28; 24:1). Jehoiachin, or Jeconiah, is the one that Jeremiah denounces

(Jer 22:24-30) and on whom he ultimately pronounces a blood curse (which presents all sorts of Messianic line problems that will be discussed later).

The teenage king, Jehoiachin, is also a wicked monarch; it's his father's rebellion that causes Nebuchadnezzar to lay siege to Jerusalem a second time (597 BC). Jeconiah, or Jehoiachin, capitulates (2 Kings 24:12) and is exiled to Babylon along with many nobles. That is when the Temple is plundered (2 Kings 24:10-16), and Ezekiel is taken captive. King Jehoiachin is exiled in Babylon for 37 years, and is enslaved there. He is finally released by Evil-merodach, the son of successor to Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:27-30). (Belshazzar wasn't really Nebuchadnezzar's son, as is translated, he was his grandson.) Belshazzar was Evil-Merodach's son.

### **Zedekiah**

In Nebuchadnezzar's second siege, which takes Jehoiachin captive, he finds a son of Josiah by the name of Mattaniah. Mattaniah was a full brother of Eliakim (the one whose name was changed to Jehoikim). Therefore, Mattaniah is the uncle of Jehoiachin, who was just deported. Nebuchadnezzar changes Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah (2 Kings 23:34; 24:17; 2 Chr 36:10; Jer 1:3). Zedekiah is the king that is installed during the second siege. He doesn't succeed, and falls during the third and final siege. Zedekiah is close to Jeremiah, which is good news. The bad news is that he is a weakling, and, though he tries to help, is useless.

The son of Josiah, Eliakim, and the business of having his name changed, is all confirmed by the Babylonian chronicles, which are archeological finds. In fact, Babylonian chronicles and the Lachish letters are major finds that give us all the background and confirms these events. There was a book published in 1956 by the London Museum called *The Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings, 626 thru 556 B.C.*, written by D.J. Wiseman. We are building our historical background from 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles; there is also a lot archaeological evidence of this period.

Zedekiah was weak, vacillating, deficient, and a puppet of Babylon. The messy part of this is that while he is a puppet of Babylon, his first string officials are all pro-Egypt. Nothing gets done, the official policy being pro-Babylon, and the officials being pro-Egypt. These officials are the ones that give Jeremiah a hard time as he advocates a pro-Babylonian view from a theological position. Even though King Zedekiah is pro-Babylon and Jeremiah's message from God is that the Babylonians are God's instrument ("don't fight them"), this is God's way of judging Judah. The second string, which are pro-Egypt, say that this is treason, and that is where Jeremiah gets into all sorts of problems.

In the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign he plots against Babylon with the kings of Moab, Edom, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (Jer 27:3-11). They plot, Jeremiah denounces the whole scheme, and nothing happens. In the ninth year of Zedekiah (588 BC) he conspires with Pharaoh Haphra against Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar takes a dim view of this and

the city falls in the summer of 586 BC (2 Kings 24:20-25:7; 2 Chr 26-36:17; and Jer 38:28-39:10).

During this period Jeremiah urges surrender to Nebuchadnezzar. The Egyptian forces show up for a while, but then come back and level Jerusalem. Zedekiah tries to support Jeremiah, but doesn't do anything effective; Jeremiah's enemies treat him badly. Finally, in 586 BC, Jerusalem falls. The Jews celebrate this date annually on the morning of the ninth of Av.

Zedekiah tries to escape, which leads to an interesting situation as both Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophecy about Zedekiah (Jer 34:4; 2 Kings 25:6-7; Ezek 12:13). One of them says that Zedekiah will never see the Babylonian captivity and the other says that he will die in Babylon. The taunts are made by the second tier officials. When the city falls, Zedekiah tries to escape but is caught and chained. The first thing they do is slaughter all of his sons in front of him, and then they put his eyes out and carry him to Babylon in chains. Reread the prophecies, He never saw the Babylonian captivity, but he died there. Prophecies are literal.

### **Jeremiah Forced to Exile to Egypt**

Zedekiah is taken away in chains. Nebuchadnezzar appoints Gedaliah as governor. He is murdered by Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, who is of the Davidic house—big plot, assassination, and it comes to nothing. The rebels, the people who were involved in that mess, flee to Egypt for refuge from Nebuchadnezzar. And they force Jeremiah and Baruch, his secretary, to go with them. The great irony here is that Jeremiah, who has always preached against Egypt, and is pro-Babylon, is now forced into exile in Egypt! There is a tradition that some of the people in Egypt stoned Jeremiah. There is another rabbinical tradition: once Nebuchadnezzar defeats Egypt and takes it over, just as Jeremiah predicted, he deports Jeremiah and Baruch back to Babylon.

### **Jeremiah's Personal Background**

Jeremiah was a son of Hilkiah who was of a priestly family—not in Jerusalem, but in Anathoth. It is believed by most scholars that this Hilkiah is the same Hilkiah that found the book of the Law in the Temple. 2 Kings 22:8 notes that it is a priest by the name of Hilkiah that finds the book of the Law (perhaps the book of Deuteronomy). This Hilkiah is the descendent of Abiathar who was the sole survivor of the priests of Nob (1 Sam 22:20) and who, later ministering to David, was exiled by Saul to Anathoth (where Jeremiah was raised). He apparently had property there (according to 1 Kings 2:26). Jeremiah was in Anathoth, which may be one of the reasons he wasn't as visible as Huldah, the prophetess, was in Jerusalem (2 Kings 22:14-20). Jeremiah was not married, he was a man of means (purchase of field, Jer 32:6-15). He was called in 626 BC and had 40 years of service as a prophet. His closest companion was Baruch, the son of Neriah; Baruch was a scribe and a secretary.

## **Major Themes**

(There are several major themes besides his personal walk and personal passion to be faithful to God...) His basic premise: only faithfulness to God can guarantee a nation's security. His message is probably more desperately needed in our land today. (The US is a disaster, morally.) We have forgotten the covenant on which this country was founded. Our problems are serious, desperate and our answers are no different than Jeremiah had laid out before Judah. Judah was facing its enemies, and we are facing ours. The answers to these problems are in our prayer closet. The problems are solved the same way that they were then: only faithfulness to God can guarantee our nation's security.

Something else which shows up in all of these things is idolatry. We constantly read about idolatry, Josiah got rid of it and it came back. We take this too lightly. Idolatry is always associated with immorality. When idolatry takes over the land, immorality follows, and vice versa. As we understand Jeremiah better we will see, with a new perception, what's going on around us.